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örnstjerne Björnson

1832-1910

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William Morton Payne, LL. D.

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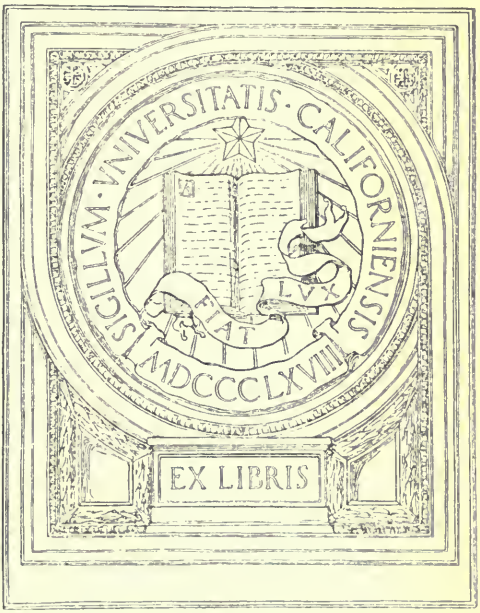

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Björnstjerne Björnson

1832-1910

Translation by
William Morton Payne

HENRIK IBSEN. By HENRIK JÆGER. *New revised edition.* Photogravure frontispiece and other illustrations. 12mo. $1.50.

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Björnstjerne Björnson

1832-1910

BY

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE, LL. D.

Translator of Björnson's "Sigurd Slembe" and Jæger's "Ibsen," Author of "Little Leaders," etc.

CHICAGO

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1910

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

When the date of Björnson's seventieth birthday drew near at the close of 1902, the present writer, who had been from boyhood a devoted admirer of the great Norwegian, wished to make an American contribution to the world-wide tribute of gratitude and affection which the then approaching anniversary was sure to evoke. The outcome of that wish was an essay, summarizing Björnson's life and work, published in "The International Quarterly," March, 1903. The essay then written forms the substance of the present publication, although several additions have been made in the way of translation, anecdote, and the consideration of Björnson's later productions. So small a book as this is, of course, hopelessly inadequate to make more than the most superficial sort of survey of the life work of that masterful personality whose recent death is so heavy a loss to all mankind.

W. M. P.

Chicago, *May, 1910.*

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON
1832–1910

EIGHT years ago, taking a bird's-eye view of the mountain peaks of contemporary literature, and writing with particular reference to Björnson's seventieth birthday, it seemed proper to make the following remarks about the most famous European authors then numbered among living men. If one were asked for the name of the greatest man of letters still living in the world, the possible claimants to the distinction would hardly be more than five in number. If it were a question of poetry alone, Swinburne would have to be named first, with Carducci for a fairly close second. But if we take literature in its larger sense, as including all the manifestations of creative activity in language, and if we insist, fur-

thermore, that the man singled out for this preëminence shall stand in some vital relation to the intellectual life of his time, and exert a forceful influence upon the thought of the present day, the choice must rather be made among the three giants of the north of Europe, falling, as it may be, upon the great-hearted Russian emotionalist who has given us such deeply moving portrayals of the life of the modern world; or upon the passionate Norwegian idealist whose finger has so unerringly pointed out the diseased spots in the social organism, earning by his moral surgery the name of pessimist, despite his declared faith in the redemption of mankind through truth and freedom and love; or, perchance, upon that other great Norwegian, equally fervent in his devotion to the same ideals, and far more sympathetic in his manner of inculcating them upon his readers, who has just

rounded out his scriptural tale of three score years and ten, and, in commemoration of the anniversary, is now made the recipient of such a tribute of grateful and whole-souled admiration as few men have ever won, and none have better deserved. It would be certainly invidious, and probably futile, to attempt a nice comparative estimate of the services of these three men to the common cause of humanity; let us be content with the admission that Björnstjerne Björnson is *primus inter pares,* and make no attempt to exalt him at the expense of his great contemporaries. Writing now eight years later, at the time when Björnson's death has plunged his country and the world in mourning, it is impressive to note that of the five men constituting the group above designated, Tolstoy alone survives to carry on the great literary tradition of the nineteenth century.

It will be well, however, to make certain distinctions between the life work of Björnson and that of the two men whom a common age and common aims bring into inevitable association with him. These distinctions are chiefly two,—one of them is that while Tolstoy and Ibsen grew to be largely cosmopolitan in their outlook, Björnson has much more closely maintained throughout his career the national, or, at any rate, the racial standpoint. The other is that while Tolstoy and Ibsen presently became, the one indifferent to artistic expression, and the other baldly prosaic where he was once deeply poetical, Björnson preserved the poetic impulse of his youth, and continued to give it play even in his envisagement of the most practical modern problems. Let us enlarge a little upon these two themes. Ernest Renan, speaking at the funeral of Tourguénieff, described the deceased nov-

elist as "the incarnation of a whole people." Even more fittingly might the phrase be applied to Björnson, for it would be difficult to find anywhere else in modern literature a figure so completely and profoundly representative of his race. In the frequently quoted words of Dr. Brandes, to speak the name of Björnson in any assembly of his countrymen is like "hoisting the Norwegian flag." It has been maliciously added that mention of his name is also like flaunting a red flag in the sight of a considerable proportion of the assembly, for Björnson has always been a fighter as well as an artist, and it has been his self-imposed mission to arouse his fellow countrymen from their mental sluggishness no less than to give creative embodiment to their types of character and their ideal aspirations. But whatever the opposition aroused by his political and social radicalism, even his

opponents have been constrained to feel that he was the mouthpiece of their race as no other Norwegian before him had been, and that he has voiced whatever is deepest and most enduring in the Norwegian temper. Powerful as has been his appeal to the intellect and conscience of the modern world at large, it has always had a special note of admonition or of cheer for his own people. With reference to the second of our two themes, it is sufficient to say that, although the form of verse was almost wholly abandoned by him during the latter half of his life, the breath of poetry never ceased to exhale from his work, and the lyric exuberance of his later prose still recalls to us the singer of the sixties.

Few productions of modern literature have proved as epoch-making as the modest little volume called "Synnöve Solbakken," which appeared in the book shops of

Christiania and Copenhagen in 1857. It was a simple tale of peasant life, an idyl of the love of a boy and a girl, but it was absolutely new in its style, and in its intimate revelation of the Norwegian character. It must be remembered that until the year 1814, Norway had for centuries been politically united with Denmark, and that Copenhagen had been the common literary centre of the two countries. To that city Norwegian writers had gravitated as naturally as French writers gravitate to Paris. There had resulted from this condition of things a literature which, although it owed much to men of Norwegian birth, was essentially a Danish literature, and must properly be so styled. That literature could boast, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, an interesting history comparable in its antiquity with the greater literatures of Europe, and a brilliant history for at least

a hundred years past. But old literatures are sure to become more or less sophisticated and trammelled by traditon, and to this rule Danish literature was no exception. When the constitution of Eidsvold, in 1814, separated Norway from Denmark, and made it into an independent kingdom (save for the forced Swedish partnership), the country had practically no literary tradition save that which centred about the Danish capital. She might claim to have been the native country of many Danish writers, even of Ludvig Holberg, the greatest writer that the Scandinavian peoples have yet produced, but she could point to nothing that might fairly be called a Norwegian literature. The young men of the rising generation were naturally much concerned about this, and a sharp divergence of opinion arose as to the means whereby the interests of Norwegian literature might be furthered,

and the aims which it should have in view. One party urged that the literature should break loose from its traditional past, and aim at the cultivation of an exclusively national spirit. The other party declared such a course to be folly, contending that literature must be a product of gradual development rather than of set volition, and that, despite the shifting of the political kaleidoscope, the national literature was so firmly rooted in its Danish past that its natural evolution must be an outgrowth from all that had gone before.

Each of these parties found a vigorous leader, the cause of ultra-Norwegianism being championed by Wergeland, an erratic person in whom the spark of genius burned, but who never found himself, artistically speaking. The champion of the conservatives was Welhaven, a polished writer of singular charm and much force, philosophical in temper, whose graceful

verse and acute criticism upheld by both precept and practice the traditional standards of culture. Each of these men had his followers, who proved in many cases more zealous than their leaders. The period of the thirties and forties was dominated by this Wergeland-Welhaven controversy, which engendered much bitterness of feeling, and which constitutes the capital fact in Norwegian literary history before the appearance of Ibsen and Björnson upon the scene. A sort of parallel might be drawn for American readers by taking two such men as Whitman and Longfellow, opposing them to one another in the most outspoken fashion, assuming for both a sharply polemic manner, and ranging among their respective followers all the other writers of their time. Then imagine the issue between them to be drawn not only in the field of letters, but also in the pulpit, the theatre, and the po-

litical arena, and some slight notion may be obtained of the condition of affairs which preceded the advent of Björnson and the true birth of Norwegian literature with "Synnöve Solbakken."

The work which was thus destined to mark the opening of a new era in Norwegian letters was written in the twenty-fifth year of its author's life. The son of a country pastor, Björnstjerne Björnson was born at Kvikne, December 8, 1832. At the age of six, his father was transferred to a new parish in the Romsdal, one of the most picturesque regions in Norway. The impression made upon his sensitive nature by these surroundings was deep and enduring. Looking back upon his boyhood he speaks with strong emotion of the evenings when "I stood and watched the sunlight play upon mountain and fiord, until I wept, as if I had done something wrong, and when, borne

down upon my ski into one valley or another I could stand as if spellbound by a beauty, by a longing that I could not explain, but that was so great that along with the highest joy I had, also, the deepest sense of imprisonment and sorrow." This is the mood which was to be given utterance in that wonderful lyric, "Over the Lofty Mountains," in which all the ardor and the longings of passionate and impatient youth find the most appealing expression. The song is found in "Arne," and may be thus reproduced, after a fashion, in the English language.

"Often I wonder what there may be
Over the lofty mountains.
Here the snow is all I see,
Spread at the foot of the dark green tree;
Sadly I often ponder,
Would I were over yonder.

"Strong of wing soars the eagle high
Over the lofty mountains,
Glad of the new day soars to the sky,
Wild in pursuit of his prey doth fly;
Pauses, and, fearless of danger,
Scans the far coasts of the stranger.

"The apple-tree, whose thoughts ne'er fly
Over the lofty mountains,
Leaves, when the summer days draw nigh,
Patiently waits for the time when high
The birds in its boughs shall be swinging,
Yet will know not what they are singing.

"He who has yearned so long to go
Over the lofty mountains—
He whose visions and fond hopes grow
Dim, with the years that so restless flow—
Knows what the birds are singing,
Glad in the tree-tops swinging.

"Why, oh bird, dost thou hither fare
Over the lofty mountains?
Surely it must be better there,
Broader the view and freer the air;
Com'st thou these longings to bring me;
These only, and nothing to wing me?

"Oh, shall I never, never go
Over the lofty mountains!
Must all my thoughts and wishes so
Held in these walls of ice and snow
Here be imprisoned forever?
Till death shall I flee them never?

"Hence! I will hence! Oh, so far from here,
Over the lofty mountains!
Here 't is so dull, so unspeakably drear;
Young is my heart and free from fear—
Better the walls to be scaling
Than here in my prison lie wailing.

"One day, I know, shall my soul free roam
Over the lofty mountains.
Oh, my God, fair is thy home,
Ajar is the door for all who come;
Guard it for me yet longer,
Till my soul through striving grows stronger."

At the age of eleven Björnson's school days began at Molde, and were continued at Christiania in a famous preparatory school, where he had Ibsen for a comrade. He entered the university in his twentieth year, but his career was not brilliant from a scholastic point of view, and he was too much occupied with his own intellectual concerns to be a model student. From his matriculation in 1852, to the appearance of his first book in 1857, he was occupied with many sorts of literary experiments, and became actively engaged in journalism. The theatre, in particular, attracted him, for the theatre was one of the chief foci of the intellectual life of his country (as it should be in every country), and he

plunged into dramatic criticism as the avowed partisan of Norwegian ideals, holding himself, in some sort, the successor of Wergeland, who had died about ten years earlier. Before becoming a dramatic critic, he had essayed dramatic authorship, and the acceptance by the theatre of his juvenile play, "Valborg," had led to a somewhat unusual result. He was given a free ticket of admission, and a few weeks of theatre-going opened his eyes to the defects of his own accepted work, which he withdrew before it had been inflicted upon the public. The full consciousness of his poetical calling came to him upon his return from a student gathering at the university town of Upsala, whither he had gone as a special correspondent. "When I came home from the journey," he says, "I slept three whole days with a few brief intervals for eating and conversation. Then I wrote down

my impressions of the journey, but just because I had first lived and then written, the account got style and color; it attracted attention, and made me all the more certain that the hour had come. I packed up, went home, thought it all over, wrote and rewrote 'Between the Battles' in a fortnight, and travelled to Copenhagen with the completed piece in my trunk; I would be a poet." He then set to writing "Synnöve Solbakken," published it in part as a newspaper serial, and then in book form, in the autumn of 1857. He had "commenced author" in good earnest.

The next fifteen years of Björnson's life were richly productive. Within a single year he had published "Arne," the second of his peasant idyls and perhaps the most remarkable of them all, and had also published two brief dramas, "Halte-Hulda" and the one already mentioned as the

achievement of fourteen feverish days. The remaining product of the fifteen years includes two more prose idyls, "A Happy Boy" and "The Fisher Maiden" (with a considerable number of small pieces similar in character); three more plays drawn from the treasury of old Norse history, "King Sverre," "Sigurd Slembe," and "Sigurd Jorsalfar"; a dramatic setting of the story of "Mary Stuart in Scotland"; a little social comedy, "The Newly Married Couple," which offers a foretaste of his later exclusive preoccupation with modern life; "Arnljot Gelline," his only long poem, a wild narrative of the clash between heathendom and the Christian faith in the days of Olaf the Holy; and, last but by no means least, the collection of his "Poems and Songs." Thus at the age of forty, Björnson found himself with a dozen books to his credit, books which

had stirred his fellow countrymen as no other books had ever stirred them, arousing them to the full consciousness of their own nature and of its roots in their own heroic past. He had become the voice of his people as no one had been before him, the singer of all that was noble in Norwegian aspiration, the sympathetic delineator of all that was essential in Norwegian character. He had, in short, created a national literature where none had before existed, and he was still in his early prime.

The collected edition of Björnson's "Tales," published in 1872, together with "The Bridal March," separately published in the following year, gives us a complete representation of that phase of his genius which is best known to the world at large. Here are five stories of considerable length, and a number of slighter sketches, in which the Norwegian peasant is por-

trayed with intimate and loving knowledge. The peasant tale was no new thing in European literature, for the names of Auerbach and George Sand, to say nothing of many others, at once come to the mind. In Scandinavian literature, its chief representative had been the Danish novelist, Blicher, who had written with insight and charm of the peasantry of Jutland. But in the treatment of peasant life by most of Björnson's predecessors there had been too much of the *de haut en bas* attitude; the peasant had been drawn from the outside, viewed philosophically, and invested with artificial sentiment. Björnson was too near to his own country folk to commit such faults as these; he was himself of peasant stock, and all his boyhood life had been spent in close association with men who wrested a scanty living from an ungrateful soil. Although a poet by instinct, he was not afraid of realism,

and did not shrink from giving the brutal aspects of peasant life a place upon his canvas. In emphasizing the characteristics of reticence and *naïveté* he really discovered the Norwegian peasant for literary purposes. Beneath the words spoken by his characters we are constantly made to realize that there are depths of feeling that remain unexpressed; whether from native pride or from a sense of the inadequacy of mere words to set forth a critical moment of life, his men and women are distinguished by the most laconic utterance, yet their speech always has dramatic fitness and bears the stamp of sincerity. Jæger speaks of the manifold possibilities of this laconic method in the following words:—

"It is as if the author purposely set in motion the reader's fancy and feeling that they might do their own work. The greatest poet is he who understands how to awaken fancy and feeling to their highest degree of self-

activity. And this is Björnson's greatness in his peasant novels, that he has poured from his horn of plenty a wealth of situations and motives that hold the reader's mind and burn themselves into it, that become his personal possession just because the author has known how to suggest so much in so few words."

In some respects, the little sketch called "The Father" is the supreme example of Björnson's artistry in this kind. There are only a few pages in all, but they embody the tragedy of a lifetime. The little work is a literary gem of the purest water, and it reveals the whole secret of the author's genius as displayed in his early tales. It is by these tales of peasant life that Björnson is best known outside of his own country; one may almost say that it is by them alone that he is really familiar to English readers. A free translation of "Synnöve Solbakken" was made as early as 1858, by Mary Howitt, and published under the title of "Trust and Trial." Translations of the other tales were made

soon after their original appearance, and in some instances have been multiplied. It is thus a noteworthy fact that Björnson, although four years the junior of Ibsen, enjoyed a vogue among English readers for a score of years during which the name of Ibsen was absolutely unknown to them. The whirligig of time has brought in its revenges of late years, and the long neglected older author has had more than the proportional share of our attention than is fairly his due.

In his delineation of the Norwegian peasant character, Björnson was greatly aided by the study of the sagas, which he had read with enthusiasm from his earliest boyhood. Upon them his style was largely formed, and their vivid dramatic representation of the life of the early Norsemen impressed him profoundly, shaping both his ideals and the form of their expression. The modern Scandinavian may well be en-

vied for his literary inheritance from the heroic past. No other European has anything to compare with it for clean-cut vigor and wealth of romantic material. The literature which blossomed in Iceland and flourished for two or three centuries wherever Norsemen made homes for themselves offers a unique intellectual phenomenon, for nothing like their record remains to us from any other primitive people. This

> "Tale of the Northland of old
> And the undying glory of dreams,"

proved a lasting stimulus to Björnson's genius, and, during the early period of his career, which is now under review, it made its influence felt alike in his tales, his dramas, and his songs. "To see the peasant in the light of the sagas and the sagas in the light of the peasant" he declared to be the fundamental principle of his literary method.

It has been seen that during the fifteen years which made Björnson in so peculiar a sense the spokesman of his race, he wrote no less than five saga dramas. The first two of these works, "Between the Battles" and "Halte-Hulda," are rather slight performances, and the third, "King Sverre," although a more extended work, is not particularly noteworthy. The grimness of the Viking life is softened by romantic coloring, and the poet has not freed himself from the influence of Oehlenschlæger. But in "Sigurd Slembe" he found a subject entirely worthy of his genius, and produced one of the noblest masterpieces of all modern literature. This largely planned and magnificently executed dramatic trilogy was written in Munich, and published in 1862. The material is found in the "Heimskringla," but the author has used the prerogative of the artist to simplify the historical outline

thus offered into a superb imaginative creation, rich in human interest, and powerful in dramatic presentation. The story is concerned with the efforts of Sigurd, nicknamed "Slembe," to obtain the succession to the throne of Norway during the first half of the twelfth century. He was a son of King Magnus Barfod, and, although of illegitimate birth, might legally make this claim. The secret of his birth has been kept from him until he has come to manhood, and the revelation of this secret by his mother is made in the first section of the trilogy, which is a single act, written in blank verse. Recognizing the futility of urging his birthright at this time, he starts off to win fame as a crusader, the sort of fame that haloed Sigurd Jorsalfar, then king of Norway. The remainder of the work is in prose, and was, in fact, written before this poetical prologue. The second section, in three

acts, deals with an episode in the Orkneys, five years later. Sigurd has not even then journeyed to the Holy Land, but he has wandered elsewhere afar, thwarted ambition and the sense of injustice ever gnawing at his heart. He becomes entangled in a feudal quarrel concerning the rule of the islands. Both parties seek to use him for their purposes, but in the end, although leadership is in his grasp, he tears himself away, appalled by the revelation of crime and treachery in his surroundings. In this section of the work we have the subtly conceived and Hamlet-like figure of Earl Harald, in whose interest Frakark, a Norse Lady Macbeth, plots the murder of Earl Paul, only to bring upon Harald himself the terrible death that she has planned for his brother. Here, also, we have the gracious maiden figure of Audhild, perhaps the loveliest of all Björnson's delineations of womanhood, a figure

worthy to be ranked with the heroines of Shakespeare and Goethe, who remains sweet and fragrant in our memory forever after. With the mutual love of Sigurd and Audhild comes the one hour of sunshine in both their lives, but the love is destined to end in a noble renunciation and to leave only a hallowed memory in token of its brief existence.

Ten more years as a crusader and a wanderer over the face of the earth pass by before we meet with Sigurd again in the third section of the trilogy. But his resolution is taken. He has returned to his native land, and will claim his own. The land is now ruled by Harald Gille, who is, like Sigurd Slembe, an illegitimate son of Magnus Barfod, and who, during the last senile years of Sigurd Jorsalfar's life, had won the recognition that Sigurd Slembe might have won had he not missed the chance, and been acknowledged as the

king's brother. When the king died, he left a son named Magnus, who should have been his successor, but whom Harald Gille seized, blinded, and imprisoned that he might himself occupy the throne. The five acts of this third section of the trilogy cover the last two years of Sigurd Slembe's life, years during which he seeks to gain his end, first by conciliation, and afterwards, maddened by the base treachery of the king and his followers, by assassination and violence. He has become a hard man, but, however wild his schemes of revenge, and however desperate his measures, he retains our sympathy to the end because we feel that circumstances have made him the ravager of his country, and that his underlying motive all along has not been a merely personal ambition, but an immense longing to serve his people, and to rule them with justice and wisdom. The final scene of all has a

strange and solemn beauty. It is on the eve of the battle in which Sigurd is to be captured and put to death by his enemies. The actual manner of his death was too horrible even for the purposes of tragedy; and the poet has chosen the better part in ending the play with a foreshadowing of the outcome. Sigurd has made his last stand, his Danish allies have deserted him, and he well knows what will be the next day's issue. And here we have one of the noblest illustrations in all literature of that *Versöhnung* which is the last word of tragic art. For in this supreme hour the peace of mind which he has sought for so many years comes to him when least expected, and all the tempests of life are stilled. That reconciliation which the hour of approaching death brings to men whose lives have been set at tragic pitch, has come to him also; he now sees that this was the inevitable end, and the recognition

of the fitness with which events have shaped themselves brings with it an exaltation of soul in which life is seen revealed in its true aspect. No longer veiled in the mists which have hitherto hidden it from his passionate gaze, he takes note of what it really is, and casts it from him. In this hour of passionless contemplation such a renunciation is not a thing torn from the reluctant soul, but the clear solution, so long sought, of the problem so long blindly attempted. That which his passion-enslaved self has so struggled to avert, his higher self, at last set free, calmly and gladly accepts.

"What miracle is this? for in the hour I prayed, the prayer was granted! Peace, perfect peace! Then I will go to-morrow to my last battle as to the altar; peace shall at last be mine for all my longings.

"How this autumn evening brings reconciliation to my soul! Sun and wave and shore and sea flow all together, as in the thought of God all others; never yet has it seemed so fair to me. But it is not mine to rule over this lovely

land. How greatly I have done it ill! But how has it all so come to pass? for in my wanderings I saw thy mountains in every sky, I yearned for home as a child longs for Christmas, yet I came no sooner, and when at last I came, I gave thee wound upon wound.

"But now, in contemplative mood, thou gazest upon me, and givest me at parting this fairest autumn night of thine; I will ascend yonder rock and take a long farewell."

The action of "Sigurd Slembe" is interspersed with several lyrics, the most striking of which is here translated in exact reproduction of the original form:

"Sin and Death, at break of day,
Day, day,
Spoke together with bated breath;
'Marry thee, sister, that I may stay,
Stay, stay,
In thy house,' quoth Death.

"Death laughed aloud when Sin was wed,
Wed, wed,
And danced on the bridal day:
But bore that night from the bridal bed,
Bed, bed,
The groom in a shroud away.

"Death came to her sister at break of day,
Day, day,
And Sin drew a weary breath;

'He whom thou lovest is mine for aye,
Aye, aye,
Mine he is,' quoth Death."

One more saga drama was to be written by Björnson, but "Sigurd Slembe" remains his greatest achievement in this field of activity. Its single successor, "Sigurd Jorsalfar," was not published until ten years later, and may not be compared with it for either strength or poetic inspiration. The author called it a "folk-play," and announced the intention, which was never fulfilled, of making several similar experiments with scenes from the sagas, "which should appeal to every eye and every stage of culture, to each in its own way, and at the performance of which all, for the time being, would experience the joy of fellow feeling." The experiment proves interesting, and is carried out without didacticism or straining after sensational effects; the play is vigorous and well planned, but for the reader it

has little of the dramatic impressiveness of its predecessor, although as an acting drama it is better fitted for the requirements of the stage.

The two volumes which contain the greater part of Björnson's poetry not dramatic in form were both published in 1870. One of them was the collection of his "Poems and Songs," the other was the epic cycle, "Arnljot Gelline," the only long poem that he has written. The volume of lyrics includes many pieces of imperfect quality and slight value,—personal tributes and occasional productions,—but it includes also those national songs that every Norwegian knows by heart, that are sung upon all national occasions by the author's friends and foes alike, and that have made him the greatest of Norway's lyric poets. No translation can ever quite reproduce their cadence or their feeling; they illustrate the one aspect of Björnson's many-

sided genius that must be taken on trust by those who cannot read his language. A friend once asked him upon what occasion he had felt most fully the joy of being a poet. His reply was as follows:—

"It was when a party from the Right in Christiania came to my house and smashed all my windows. For when they had finished their assault, and were starting home again, they felt that they had to sing something, and so they began to sing, 'Yes, we love this land of ours'—they could n't help it. They had to sing the song of the man they had attacked."

Into this collection were gathered the lyrics scattered through the peasant tales and the saga dramas, thus making it completely representative of his quality as a singer. A revised and somewhat extended edition of this volume was published about ten years later. Björnson has had the rare fortune of having his lyrics set to music by three composers—Nordraak, Kjerulf, and Grieg—as intensely national in spirit as himself, and no festal occasion

among Norwegians is celebrated without singing the national hymn, "Yes, We Love This Land of Ours," or the noble choral setting of "Olaf Trygvason." The best folk-singer is he who stands in the whirling round of life, says the poet, and he reveals the very secret of his power when he tells us that life was ever more to him than song, and that existence, where it was worth while, in the thick of the human fray, always had for him a deeper meaning than anything he had written. The longest poem in Björnson's collection is called "Bergliot," and is a dramatic monologue in which the foul slaying of her husband Ejnar Tambarskelve and their son Ejndride is mourned by the bereaved wife and mother. The story is from the saga of Harald Haardraada, and is treated with the deepest tragic impressiveness.

"Odin in Valhal I dare not seek
For him I forsook in my childhood.
And the new God in Gimle?
He took all that I had!
Revenge:—Who says revenge?—
Can revenge awaken my dead
Or shelter me from the cold?
Has it comfort for a widow's home
Or for a childless mother?
Away with your revenge: Let be!
Lay him on the litter, him and the son.
Come, we will follow them home.
The new God in Gimle, the terrible, who took all,
Let him also take revenge, for he understands it!
Drive slowly: Thus drove Ejnar ever;
—Soon enough shall we reach home."

It was also to the "Heimskringla" that Björnson turned for the subject of his epic cycle, "Arnljot Gelline." Here we read in various rhythms of Arnljot the outlaw, how the hands of all men are against him; how he offers to stay his wrath and end the blood feud if the fair Ingigerd, Trand's daughter, may be bestowed upon him; how, being refused, he sets fire to Trand's house and bears

Ingigerd away captive; how her tears prevail upon him to release her, and how she seeks refuge in a southern cloister; how Arnljot wanders restless over sea and land until he comes to King Olaf, on the eve of the great battle, receives the Christian faith, fights fiercely in the vanguard against the hosts of the heathen, and, smiling, falls with his king on the field of Stiklestad. One song from this cycle, "The Cloister in the South" is here reproduced in an exact copy of the original metre, in the hope that even this imperfect representation of the poem may be better than none at all.

"Who would enter so late the cloister in?"
"A maid forlorn from the land of snow."
"What sorrow is thine, and what thy sin?"
"The deepest sorrow the heart can know.
I have nothing done
Yet must still endeavor,
Though my strength be none,
To wander ever.
Let me in, to seek for my pain surcease,
I can find no peace."

"From what far-off land hast thou taken flight?"
"From the land of the North, a weary way."
"What stayed thy feet at our gate this night?"
"The chant of the nuns, for I heard them pray,
And the song gave peace
To my soul, and blessed me;
It offered release
From the grief that oppressed me.
Let me in, so if peace to give be thine,
I may make it mine."

"Name me the grief that thy life hath crossed."
"Rest may I never, never know."
"Thy father, thy lover, thou hast then lost?"
"I lost them both at a single blow,
And all I held dear
In my deepest affection;
Aye, all that was near
To my heart's recollection.
Let me in, I am failing, I beg, I implore,
I can bear no more."

"How was it that thou thy father lost?"
"He was slain, and I saw the deed."
"How was it that thou thy lover lost?"
"My father he slew, and I saw the deed.
I wept so bitterly
When he roughly would woo me,
He at last set me free,
And forbore to pursue me.
Let me in, for the horror my soul doth fill.
That I love him still."

Chorus of nuns within the Church.

"Come child, come bride,
To God's own side,
From grief find rest
On Jesus' breast.
Rest thy burden of sorrow.
On Horeb's height;
Like the lark, with to-morrow
Shall thy soul take flight.

Here stilled is all yearning,
No passion returning;
No terror come near thee
When the Saviour can hear thee.
For He, if in need be
Thy storm-beaten soul,
Though it bruised as a reed be,
Shall raise it up whole."

Despite the power and beauty of an occasional manifestation of his genius during the late sixties and early seventies, the poetic impulse that had made Björnson the most famous of Norwegian authors seemed, toward the close of the fifteen-year period just now under review, to be well nigh exhausted. Even among those who had followed his career most closely there were few who could anticipate the

splendid new outburst of activity for which he was preparing. These years seemed to be a dead time, not only in Björnson's life, but also in the general intellectual life of the Scandinavian countries. Dr. Brandes thus describes the feelings of a thoughtful observer during that period of stagnation. "In the North one had the feeling of being shut off from the intellectual life of the time. We were sitting with closed doors, a few brains struggling fruitlessly with the problem of how to get them opened. . . With whole schools of foreign literature the cultivated Dane had almost no acquaintance; and when, finally, as a consequence of political animosity, intellectual intercourse with Germany was broken off, the main channel was closed through which the intellectual developments of the day had been communicated to Norway as well as Denmark. French influence was dreaded as

immoral, and there was but little understanding of either the English language or spirit." But an intellectual renaissance was at hand, an intellectual reawakening with a cosmopolitan outlook, and Björnson was destined to become its leader, much as he had been the leader of the national movement of an earlier decade. During these years of seeming inactivity, comparatively speaking, he had read and thought much, and the new thought of the age had fecundated his mind. Historical and religious criticism, educational and social problems, had taken possession of his thought, and the philosophy of evolution had transformed the whole tenor of his ideas, shaping them to deeper issues and more practical purposes than had hitherto engaged them. He had read widely and variously in Darwin, Spencer, Mill, Müller, and Taine; he had, in short, scaled the "lofty mountains" that had so

hemmed in his early view, and made his way into the intellectual kingdoms of the modern world that lay beyond. The *Weltgeist* had appealed to him with its irresistible behest, just as it appealed at about the same time to Ibsen and Tolstoy and Ruskin, and had made him a man of new interests and ideals.

One might have found foreshadowings of this transformation in certain of his earlier works,—in "The Newly Married Couple," for example, with its delicate analysis of a common domestic relation, or in "The Fisher Maiden," with its touch of modernity,—but from these suggestions one could hardly have prophesied the enthusiasm and the genial force with which Björnson was to project his personality into the controversial arena of modern life. The series of works which have come from his pen during the past thirty-five years have dealt with most of the

graver problems which concern society as a whole,—politics, religion, education, the status of women, the license of the press, the demand of the socialist for a reconstruction of the old order. They have also dealt with many of the delicate questions of individual ethics,—the relations of husband and wife, of parent and child, the responsibility of the merchant to his creditors and of the employer to his dependants, the double standard of morality for men and women, and the duty devolving upon both to transmit a vigorous strain to their offspring. These are some of the themes that have engaged the novelist and dramatist; they have also engaged the public speaker and lay preacher of enlightenment, as well as themes of a more strictly political character, such as the separation of Norway from the Dual Monarchy, the renewal of the ancient bond between Norway and Iceland, the free de-

velopment of parliamentary government, the cause of Pangermanism, and the furtherance of peace between the nations. An extensive programme, surely, even in this summary enumeration of its more salient features, but one to which his capacity has not proved unequal, and which he has carried out by the force of his immense energy and superabundant vitality. The burden of all this tendencious matter has caused his art to suffer at times, no doubt, but his inspiration has retained throughout much of the marvellous freshness of the earlier years, and the genius of the poet still flashes upon us from a prosaic environment, sometimes in a lovely lyric, more frequently, however, in the turn of a phrase or the psychological envisagement of some supreme moment in the action of the story or the drama.

The great transformation in Björnson's literary manner and choice of subjects was

marked by his sending home from abroad, in the season of 1874-75, two plays, "The Editor" and "A Bankruptcy." It was two years later that Ibsen sent home from abroad "The Pillars of Society," which marked a similar turning point in his artistic career. It is a curious coincidence that the plays of modern life produced during this second period by these two men are the same in number, an even dozen in each case. Besides the two above named, these modern plays of Björnson are, with their dates, the following: "The King" (1877), "Leonarda" (1879), "The New System" (1879), "A Glove" (1883), "Beyond the Strength I." (1883), "Geography and Love" (1885), "Beyond the Strength II." (1895), "Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg" (1898), "Laboremus" (1901), and "At Storhove" (1902). Since the cessation of Ibsen's activity, Björnson has

outrun him in the race, adding "Daglannet" (1904), and "When the New Wine Blooms" (1909) to the list above given. Besides these fourteen plays, however, he has published seven important volumes of prose fiction during the last thirty-five years. The titles and dates are as follows: "Magnhild" (1877), "Captain Mansana" (1879), "Dust" (1882), "Flags Are Flying in City and Harbor" (1884), "In God's Ways," (1889), "New Tales" (1894), (of which collection "Absalom's Hair" is the longest and most important), and "Mary" (1906). The achievement represented by this list is all the more extraordinary when we consider the fact that for the greater part of the thirty-five years which these plays and novels cover, their author has been, both as a public speaker and as a writer for the periodical press, an active participant in the political and social life of his country.

Most of these books must be dismissed with a few words in order that our remaining space may be given to the four or five that are of the greatest power and significance. "The Editor," the first of the modern plays, offers a fierce satire upon modern journalism, its dishonesty, its corrupt and malicious power, its personal and partisan prejudice. The character of the editor in this play was unmistakeably drawn, in its leading characteristics, from the figure of a well known conservative journalist in Christiania, although Björnson vigorously maintained that the protraiture was typical rather than personal.

"In various other countries than my own, I have observed the type of journalist who is here depicted. It is characterized by acting upon a basis of sheer egotism, passionate and boundless, and by terrorism in such fashion that it frightens honest people away from every liberal movement, and visits upon the individual an unscrupulous persecution."

This play was not particularly successful upon the stage, but the book was widely read, and occasioned much excited personal controversy. "A Bankruptcy," on the other hand, proved a brilliant stage success. Its matter was less contentious, and its technical execution was effective and brilliant. It was not in vain that Björnson had at different times been the director of three theatres. This play has for its theme the ethics of business life, and more especially the question of the extent to which a man whose finances are embarrassed is justified in continued speculation for the ultimate protection of himself and his creditors. Despite its treatment of this serious problem, the play is lighter and more genial in vein than the author's plays are wont to be, and the element of humor is unusually conspicuous. Jæger remarks that "A Bankruptcy" did two new things for Norwegian dramatic literature. It

made money affairs a legitimate subject for literary treatment, and it raised the curtain upon the Norwegian home. "It was with 'A Bankruptcy' that the home made its first appearance upon the stage, the home with its joys and sorrows, with its conflicts and its tenderness."

Two years later appeared "The King," which is in many respects Björnson's greatest modern masterpiece in dramatic form. He had by this time become a convinced republican, but he was also an evolutionist, and he knew that republics are not created by fiat. He believed the tendency toward republicanism to be irresistible, but he believed also that there must be intermediate stages in the transition from monarchy. Absolutism is succeeded by constitutionalism, and that by parliamentarism, and that in the end must be succeeded by a republicanism that will free itself from all the traditional forms of

symbol and ceremonial. He had also a special belief that the smaller peoples were better fitted for development in this direction than the larger and more complex societies, although, on the other hand, he thought that the process of growth into full self-government was likely to be slower among the Germanic than among the Latin races. In the deeply moving play now to be considered, we have, in the character of the titular king, an extraordinary piece of psychological analysis. The king is young, physically delicate, and of highly sensitive organization. When he comes to the throne he realizes the hollowness and the hypocrisy of the existence that prescription has marked out for him; he realizes also that the very ideal of monarchy, under the conditions of modern European civilization, is a gigantic falsehood. For a time after his accession, he leads a life of pleasure seeking and revelry,

hoping that he may dull his sense of the sharp contrast that exists between his station and his ideals. But his conscience will give him no peace, and he turns to deliberate contemplation of the thought, not indeed of abdicating his false position, but of transforming it into something more consonant with truth and the demands of the age. He will become a citizen king, and take for wife a daughter of the people; he will do away with the pomp and circumstance of his court, and attempt to lead a simple and natural life, in which the interests of the people shall be paramount in his attention. But in this attempt he is thwarted at every step. All the forces of selfishness and prejudice and ignorance combine against him; even the people whom he seeks to benefit are so wedded to their idols that their attitude is one of suspicion rather than of sympathy. He loves a young woman of strong

and noble character, and wins her love in return, but she dies on the very eve of their union. His oldest and most confidential friend, the wealthiest man in the kingdom, but a republican, is murdered by a radical associate of the *intransigeant* type, and the king is left utterly bereaved by his twofold loss. This brings us to the closing scene of the drama, in which the king, his nerves strained to the breaking point, confronts the group of officials and others who bring to him the empty phrases of a conventional condolence:—

The King. Hush! Have a little respect for the truth that should follow death! Understand me rightly: I do not mean that any of you would lie. But the very air about a king is infected. It was of that—a word or two. My time is short. But a testament....

The Priest. Testament.

The King. Neither the Old nor the New! Greet what is called Christianity here in this land—greet it from me! I have thought much about Christian folk of late.

The Priest. That rejoices me.

The King. How your tone cuts me! Greet

it from me, what is called Christianity here in this land. Nay, do not crane your necks and bend your backs as if the wisdom of the ages were now forthcoming. (*aside*) Can there be any use in saying something seriously? (*aloud*) You are Christians?

The General. God forbid the doubt! Faith is exceedingly useful....

The King. For discipline. (*to the Sheriff*) And you?

The Sheriff. From my blessed ancestors I received the faith.

The King. So *they* are blessed also. Why not?

The Sheriff. They brought me strictly up to fear God, to honor the king.

The King. And love your fellowmen. You are a State individual, sheriff. And such are Christians nowadays. (*to the Merchant*) And you?

The Merchant. I have not been able to go to church very much of late because of my cough. And in the foul air....

The King. You go to sleep. But are you a Christian?

The Merchant. That goes without saying.

The King. (*to the Priest.*) And *you* are naturally one?

The Priest. By the grace of Jesus I hope that I am.

The King. That is the formula, boys, that is the accepted thing to say. Therefore, you are a Christian community, and it is no fault

of mine if such a community will not deal seriously with what concerns Christianity. Greet it from me, and say that it must have an eye to the institution of monarchy.

The Priest. Christianity has nothing to do with such matters. It searches *the inner man.*

The King. That tone! I know it—it does not search the air in which the patient lives, but the lungs. There you have it! Nevertheless, Christianity must have an eye to the monarchy—must pluck the lie from it—must not follow it to its coronation in the church, as an ape follows a peacock. I know what I felt in that situation. I had gone through with a rehearsal the day before—ho, ho! Ask the Christianity in this land, if it be not time to concern itself with the monarchy. It should hardly any longer, it seems to me, let the monarchy play the part of the seductive wanton—who turns the thoughts of all citizens to war—which is much against the message of Christianity—and to class distinctions, to luxury, to show and vanity. The monarchy is now so great a lie that it compels the most upright man to share in its falsehood."

The conversation that follows is in a vein of bitterness on the one side, and of obtuse smugness on the other; the tragic irony of the action grows deeper and deeper, until in the end the king, completely disheart-

ened and despairing, goes into an adjoining room, and dies by his own hand, to the consternation of the men from whom he has just parted. They give utterance to a few polite phrases, charitably accounting for the deed by the easy attribution of insanity to the king, and the curtain falls.

It may well be imagined that "The King" made a stir in literary and social circles, and quite noticeably fluttered the dovecotes of conventionality and conservatism. Such plain speaking and such deadly earnestness of conviction were indeed far removed from the idyllic simplicity of the peasant tales and from the poetical reconstructions of the legendary past. Eight years later, Björnson prefaced a new edition of this work with a series of reflections upon "Intellectual Freedom" that constitute one of the most vigorous and remarkable examples of his serious prose. The central ideas of his political faith are

embodied in the following sentences from this preface:—

"Intellectual Freedom. Why is not attention called over and over again to the fact that for the great peoples, who have so many compensating interests, the free commerce of ideas is one condition of life among many others; while for us, the small peoples, it is absolutely indispensable. A people numerically large may attain to ways of thought and enterprise that no political censure can reduce to a minimum; but under narrower conditions it may easily come about that the whole people will fall asleep. A powerful propaganda of enlightenment under the conditions of free speech is for us of the first and the last importance. When I wrote this piece it was my chief aim to enlarge the bounds of free thought. I have later made the same attempt in matters of religion and morals. When my opponents seek to sum up my character in a few words, they are apt to say: 'He attacks the throne and the altar.' It seems to me that I have served the freedom of the spirit, and in the interests of that cause I now beg leave to reply. (1) *Concerning the attack on Christianity.* It may be worth while in a country with a state church to recall now and then the meaning of Christianity. It is not an institution, still less a book, and least of all it is a house or a seminary. It is the godly life according to the precepts and ex-

ample of Jesus. There may be men who think they are attacking Christianity when they investigate the historical origin or the morality of some dogma; I do not think so. Honest investigation can result only in growth. Christianity, with or without its whole apparatus of dogma, will endure in its essence for thousands of years after us; there will always be spiritually-minded people who will be ennobled by it, and some made great. I honor all the noble. I have friends among the Christians, whom I love, and never for a moment have I thought of attacking their Christianity. I have no higher wish than to see them by its help transform certain aspects of our society into seriousness. (2) *Concerning the attack on monarchy.* Monarchy is, on the other hand, an institution, here the circumstances are naturally different. I have attacked monarchy, and I will attack it. But—and to this 'but' I call the closest attention. Shortly before the July Revolution, when its first signs were declared, Chateaubriand was talking with the King, who asked what it all meant. 'It is monarchy that is done with,' replied the royalist, for he was also a seer. Certainly there have been in France both kingdom and empire since that day. If there should be no more hereafter, they still exist in other lands, and will endure for generations after us. But 'done with' are they none the less; notice was given them by the French Revolution. It does not concern them all simultaneously; it fixes terms, differ-

ent for the different kingdoms, and far removed for the kingdoms based upon conquest. But the face of civilization is now turned toward the republic, and every people has reached the first, second, or third stage of the way.

"If a work of the mind is born of Norse conditions and stands before the ethical judgment seat—let it have its full action; otherwise it will not produce its full reaction. If the faith that gave shape to the piece is not the strongest force in the society that gave it birth, it will evoke an opposing force of greater strength. Thereby all will gain. But to ignore it, or seek to crush it—that in a large society may not greatly matter, so rich are the possibilities of other work taking its place; but in a small society it may be equivalent to destroying the sight of its only eye."

In the clean-cut phrases and moral earnestness of this *apologia pro vita sua,* which deserves to be reproduced at greater length, we have the modern Björnson, no longer poet alone, but poet and prophet at once, the champion of sincere thinking and worthy living, the Sigurd Slembe of our own day, happier than his prototype in the consciousness that the ambition to

serve his people has not been altogether thwarted, and that his beneficent activity is not made sterile even by the bitterest opposition.

Only a rapid glance may be taken at the books of the five years following upon the publication of "The King." The story of "Magnhild," planned several years earlier, represents Björnson's return to fiction after a long dramatic interlude. There are still peasants in this story, but they are different from the figures of the early tales, and the atmosphere of the work is modern. It turns upon the question of the mutual duties of husband and wife, when love no longer unites them. The solution seems to lie in separation when union has thus become essentially immoral. "Captain Mansana" is a story of Italian life, based, so the author assures us, on actual characters and happenings that had come within the range of his observation during

his stay abroad. Its interest does not lie in any particular problem, but rather in the delineation of the titular figure, a strong and impetuous person whose character suggests that of Ferdinand Lassalle, as the author himself points out to us in a prefatory note. "Dust" is a pathetic little story having for its central idea what seems like a pale reflection of the idea of Ibsen's "Ghosts," which had appeared a few months before. It is the dust of the past that settles upon our souls, and clogs their free action. The special application of this thought is to the religious training of children:—

"When you teach children that the life here below is nothing to the life above, that to be visible is nothing in comparison with being invisible, that to be a human being is nothing in comparison with being dead, that is not the way to teach them to view life properly, or to love life, to gain courage, strength for work, and love of country."

In the play, "Leonarda," and again in the play, "A Glove," the author recurs to the woman question; in the one case, his theme is the attitude of society toward the woman of blemished reputation; in the other, its attitude toward the man who in his relation with women has violated the moral law. "Leonarda" is a somewhat inconclusive work, because the issue is not clearly defined, but in "A Glove" (at least in the acting version of the play, which differs from the book in its ending) there is no lack of definiteness. This play inexorably demands the enforcement of the same standard of morality for both sexes, and declares the unchaste man to be as unfit for honorable marriage as the unchaste woman. Upon the theme thus presented a long and violent discussion raged; but if there be such a thing as an immutable moral law in this matter, it must be that upon which Björnson has so squarely and

uncompromisingly planted his feet. The other remaining work of this five-year period is the play called "The New System." The new system in question is a system of railway management, and it is a wasteful one. But the young engineer who demonstrates this fact has a hard time in opening the eyes of the public. He succeeds eventually, but not until he has encountered every sort of contemptible opposition and hypocritical evasion of the plain truth. The social satire of the piece is subtle and sharp; what the author really aims at is to illustrate, by a specific example, the repressive forces that dominate the life of a small people, and make it almost impossible for any sort of truth to triumph over prejudice.

Since the production of "A Glove," twenty years ago, eight more plays have come from Björnson's prolific pen. Of these by far the most important are the

two that are linked by the common title, "Beyond the Strength." The translation of this title is hopelessly inadequate, because the original word means much more than strength; it means talent, faculty, capability, the sum total of a man's endowment for some particular purpose. The two pieces bearing this name are quite different in theme, but certain characters appear in both, and both express the same thought,—the thought that it is vain for men to strive after the unattainable, for in so doing they lose sight of the actual possibilities of human life; the thought that much of the best human energy goes to waste because it is devoted to the pursuit of ideals that are indeed beyond the strength of man to realize. In the first of the two plays, this superhuman ideal is religious, it is that of the enthusiast who accepts literally the teaching that to faith all things are possible; in the second, the

ideal is social, it is that of the reformer who is deluded to believe that one resounding deed of terror and self-immolation for the cause of the people will suffice to overthrow the selfish existing order, and create for the toiling masses a new heaven upon earth. No deeper tragedies have been conceived by Björnson than these two, the tragedy of the saintlike Pastor Sang, who believes that the miracle of his wife's restoration to health has at last in very truth been wrought by his fervent prayer, and finds only that the ardor of his faith and hers has brought death instead of life to them both,—the tragedy of his son Elias, who dies like Samson with his foes for an equally impossible faith, and by the very violence of his fanaticism removes the goal of socialist endeavor farther than ever into the dim future. Björnson has written nothing more profoundly moving than these plays,

with their twofold treatment of essentially the same theme, nor has he written anything which offers a clearer revelation of his own rich personality, with its unfailing poetic vision, its deep tenderness, and its boundless love for all humankind. The play, "Geography and Love," which came between the two just described, is an amusing piece, in the vein of light and graceful comedy, which satirizes the man with a hobby, showing how he unconsciously comes to neglect his wife and family through absorption in his work. The author was, in a way, taking genial aim at himself in this piece, a fact which his son Björn, who played the principal part, did not hesitate to emphasize. "Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg," the next play, deals with the passions engendered by political controversy, and made much unpleasant stir in Norwegian society because certain of the characters and situations

were unmistakeably taken from real life. After these plays came "Laboremus" and "At Storhove," both concerned with substantially the same theme, which is that of the malign influence exerted by an evil-minded and reckless woman upon the lives of others. From a different point of view, we may say that the subject of these plays is the consecration of the home. This has always been a favorite theme with Björnson, and he has no clearer title to our gratitude than that which he has earned by his unfailing insistence upon the sanctity of family life, its mutual confidences, and its common joys. Completing the list, we have "Daglannet," another domestic drama of simple structure, and "When the New Wine Blooms," a study of modernity as exemplified in the young woman of to-day, of the estrangement that too often creeps into married life, and of the

stirrings that prompt men of middle age to seek to renew the joys of youth.

During the years that have passed since the publication of "Dust," Björnson has produced four volumes of fiction,—his two great novels, a third novel of less didactic mission, and a second collection of short stories. The first of the novels, "Flags Are Flying in City and Harbor," saw the light during the year following the publication of "A Glove," and the teaching of that play is again enforced with uncompromising logic in the development of the story. The work has two other main themes, and these are heredity and education. So much didactic matter as this is a heavy burden for any novel to carry, and a lesser man than Björnson would have found the task a hopeless one. That he should have succeeded even in making a fairly readable book out of this

material would have been remarkable, and it is a pronounced artistic triumph that the book should prove of such absorbing interest. For absorbingly interesting it is, to any reader who is willing that a novel should provide something more than entertainment, and who is not afraid of a work of fiction that compels him to think as he reads. The principal character is a man descended from a line of ancestors whose lives have been wild and lawless, and who have wallowed in almost every form of brutality and vice. The four preceding generations of the race are depicted for us in a series of brief but masterly characterizations, in which every stroke tells, and we witness the gradual weakening of the family stock. But with the generation just preceding the main action of the novel, there has been introduced a vigorous strain of peasant blood, and the process of regeneration has begun. It is this

process that goes on before our eyes. It does not become a completed process, but the prospect is bright for the future, and the flags that fly over town and harbor in the closing chapter have a symbolical significance, for they announce a victory of spirit over sense, not only in the cases of certain among the individual participants in the action, but also in the case of the whole community to which they belong. So much for the book as a study in heredity. As an educational tract, it has the conspicuous virtue of remaining in close touch with life while embodying the spirit of modern scientific pedagogy. The hero of the book,—the last descendant of a race struggling for moral and physical rehabilitation,—throws himself into the work of education with an energy equal to that which his forbears had turned into various perverse channels. He organizes a school,—more than half of the book, in

fact, is about this school and its work,—and seeks to introduce a system of training which shall shape the whole character of the child, a school in which truth and clean living shall be inculcated with thoroughness and absolute sincerity, a school which shall be the microcosm of the world outside, or rather of what that world ought to be. Björnson's interest in education has been life-long; for many years it had gone astray in a sort of Grundtvigian fog, but at the time when this book came to be written, it had worked its way out into the clear light of reason. If the future should cease to care for this work as a piece of literature, it will still look back to it as to a sort of nineteenth century "Emile," and take renewed heart from its inspiring message.

"In God's Ways," the second of the two great novels, is a work of which it is difficult to speak in terms of measured

praise. With its delicate and vital delineations of character, its rich sympathy and depth of tragic pathos, its plea for the sacredness of human life, and its protest against the religious and social prejudice by which life is so often misshapen, this book is an epitome of all the ideas and feelings that have gone to the making of the author's personality, and have received such manifold expression in his works. It is a simple story, concerned mainly with four people, in no way outwardly conspicuous, yet here united by the poet's art into a relationship from which issue some of the deepest of social questions, and which enforces in the most appealing terms the fundamental teaching of all the work of his mature years. First of all, we have the boyhood of the two friends who are afterwards to grow apart in their sympathies; the one alert of mind, imaginative, open to every intellectual influence, also

impetuous and hot-blooded; the other shy and intellectually stolid, but good to the very core, and moved by the strongest of altruistic impulses. In accordance with their respective characters, the first of these youths becomes a physician, and the other a clergyman. Then we have the sister of the physician, who becomes the wife of the clergyman, a noble, proud, self-centred nature, finely strung to the inmost fibre of her being. Then we have a woman of the other sort, clinging, abnormally sensitive, a child when the years of childhood are over, and made the victim of a shocking child-marriage to a crippled old man. She it is whom the physician loves, and persuades to a legal dissolution of her immoral union. After some years, he makes her his wife, and their happiness would be complete were it not for the social and religious prejudice aroused. The clergyman, whom years of service in the

state church have hardened into bigotry, is officially, as it were, compelled to condemn the friend of his boyhood, and even the sister, for a time grown untrue to her own generous nature, shares in the estrangement. In vain does the physician seek to shelter his wife from the chill of her environment. She droops, pines away, and finally dies, gracious, lovable, and even forgiving to the last. Then the death angel comes close to the clergyman and his wife, hovering over their only child, and at last the barrier of formalism and prejudice and religious bigotry is swept away from their minds. Their natural sympathies, long repressed, resume full sway, and they realize how deeply they have sinned toward the dead woman. The sister seeks a reconciliation with her brother, but he repulses her, and gives her his wife's private diary to read. In this *journal intime* she finds the full revelation

of the gentle spirit that has been done to death, and she feels that the very salvation of her life and soul depend upon winning her brother's forgiveness. The closing chapter, in which the final reconciliation occurs, is one of the most wonderful in all fiction; its pathos is of the deepest and the most moving, and he must be callous of soul, indeed, who can read it with dry eyes.

If we were to search the whole of Björnson's writings for the single passage which should most completely typify his message to his fellowmen,—not Norwegians alone, but all mankind,—the choice would have to rest upon the words spoken from the pulpit by the clergyman of this novel, on the Sunday following the certainty of his child's recovery.

"To-day a man spoke from the pulpit of the church about what he had learned.

"Namely, about what first concerns us all.

"One forgets it in his strenuous endeavor, a

second in his zeal for conflict, a third in his backward vision, a fourth in the conceit of his own wisdom, a fifth in his daily routine, and we have all learned it more or less ill. For should I ask you who hear me now, you would all reply thoughtlessly, and just because I ask you from this place, 'Faith is first.'

"No, in very truth, it is not. Watch over your child, as it struggles for breath on the outermost verge of life, or see your wife follow the child to that outermost verge, beside herself for anxiety and sleeplessness,—then love will teach you that *life comes first.* And never from this day on will I seek God or God's will in any form of words, in any sacrament, or in any book or any place, as if He were first and foremost to be found there; no, life is first and foremost—life as we win it from the depths of despair, in the victory of the light, in the grace of self-devotion, in our intercourse with living human kind. God's supreme word to us is life, our highest worship of Him is love for the living. This lesson, self-evident as it is, was needed by me more than by most others. This it is that in various ways and upon many grounds I have hitherto rejected,—and of late most of all. But never more shall words be the highest for me, nor symbols, but the eternal revelation of life. Never more will I freeze fast in doctrine, but let the warmth of life melt my will. Never will I condemn men by the dogmas of old time justice, unless they fit with our own time's gospel of love. Never,

for God's sake! And this because I believe in Him, the God of Life, and His never ending revelation in life itself."

Here is a gospel, indeed, one that needs no church for its promulgation, and no ceremonial for the enhancement of its impressiveness. It is a gospel, moreover, that is based upon no foundation of precarious logic, but finds its premises in the healthy instincts of the natural man. It is no small thing to have thus found the way, and to have helped others likewise to find the way, out of the mists of superstition, through the valleys of doubt and despondency, athwart the thickets of prejudice and bigotry with all their furtive foemen, up to these sunlit heights of serenity.

"Mary" is less explicit in its teaching than the two great novels just summarized, but what it misses in didacticism it more than gains in art. The radiant crea-

ture who gives her name to the book is one of Björnson's most exquisite figures. She is the very embodiment of youthful womanhood, filled with the joy of life, and bringing sunshine wherever she goes. Yet this temperament leads to her undoing, or what would be the undoing of any woman less splendid in character. But the strength that impels her to the misstep that comes so near to having tragic consequences is also the strength that saves her when chastened by suffering. In her the author "gives us the common stuff of life," says an English critic, "gives it us simple and direct. There is nothing here of Ibsen's pathology. We are in the sun. Her most hideous blunder cannot undo a woman's soul. Björnson knows that the deed is nothing at all. It is the soul behind the deed that he sees. Not everything that cometh out of a man defileth a man. At all events, so it is here:

triumph and joy built upon an act that—as the Philistines would say—has defiled forever." As a triumph of sheer creation, this figure is hardly overmatched anywhere in the author's portrait gallery of women.

If Björnson's essential teaching may be found in a single page, as has above been suggested, his personality evades all such summarizing. In the present essay, he has been considered as a writer merely,—poet, dramatist, novelist,—but the man is vastly more than that. His other activities have been hinted at, indeed, but nothing adequate has been said about them. The director of three theatres, the editor of three newspapers and the contributor to many others, the promoter of schools and patriotic organizations, the participant in many political campaigns, the lay preacher of private and public morals, the chosen orator of his nation for all great occasions,

—these are some of the characters in which we must view him to form anything like a complete conception of his many-sided individuality. Take the matter of oratory alone, and it is perhaps true that he has influenced as many people by the living word as he has by the printed page. He has addressed hundreds of audiences in the three Scandinavian countries and in Finland, he has spoken to more than twenty thousand at a time, and his winged speech has gone straight home to his hearers. All who ever heard him will agree that his oratory was of the most persuasive and vital impressiveness. Jæger attempts to describe it in the following words:—

"It is eloquence of a very distinctive type; its most characteristic quality is its wealth of color; it finds expression for every mood, from the lightest to the most serious, from the most vigorous to the most delicate and tender. Now his words ring like the voice of doom, filled with thunder and lightning, now they become

soft and persuasive with smiling mien. With a single cadence, or a play of the facial muscles, or a slight gesture, he can portray a person, a situation, or an object, so that it appears living in the sight of his hearers. And what the word alone cannot do, is accomplished in the most brilliant manner by the virtuosity of his delivery. He does not speak his words, he presents them; they take bodily form and seem alive."

In his more intimate relationships, on the other hand, in face to face conversation or in the home circle, the man takes on a quite different aspect; the prophet has become the friend, the impassioned preacher has become the genial story teller, and shares the gladsome or mirthful mood of the hour. Such a personality as this may be analyzed; it defies any concise synthesis. One resorts to figures of speech, and they were abundantly resorted to by those who paid him the tribute of their admiration and love upon the occasion of his seventieth anniversary. Let us take an instance at random from one of these tributes.

"The cataract that roars down to the free foaming sea. The mountain with its snowclad peaks towering up into the immensity of the starry heavens. The rustling of the woodland above the blossom-spangled and smiling meadows, the steep uptowering, the widely growing, and the joyously smiling. At once the soft melody that stirs the heart and the strong wind that sweeps over the Northern lands."

This concourse of metaphors gives some slight idea of the way in which Björnson's personality affected those who came into contact with it. The description may be supplemented by a few bits of anecdote and reminiscence. The composer Grieg contributes the following incident of the old days in Norway:—

"It was Christmas eve of 1868 at the Björnsons in Christiania. They lived then in the Rosenkrantzgade. My wife and I were, as far as I can remember, the only guests. The children were very boisterous in their glee. In the middle of the floor an immense Christmas tree was enthroned and brightly lighted. All the servant-folk came in, and Björnson spoke, beautifully and warmly, as he well knows how to do. 'Now you shall play a hymn, Grieg,'

he said, and although I did not quite like the notion of doing organist's work, I naturally complied without a murmur. It was one of Grundtvig's hymns in 32 — thirty-two verses. I resigned myself to my fate with stoicism. At the beginning I kept myself awake, but the endless repetitions had a soporific effect. Little by little I became as stupid as a medium. When we had at last got through with all the verses, Björnson said: 'Is n't that fine. Now I will read it for you!' And so we got all thirty-two verses once more. I was completely overawed."

When the poet purchased his country estate which was his home from the late seventies to the end of his life, his coming was looked forward to with mingled feelings by the good country folk of the neighborhood. Kristofer Janson thus tells the story of his arrival:

"His coming was anticipated with a certain anxiety and apprehension, for was he not a 'horrid radical'? The dean in particular thought that he might be a menace to the safe spiritual slumber of the village. As the dean one day was driving through the village in his carriole, just where the road turns sharply by the bridge below Aulestad, he met another

carriole which was rapidly driving that way and in it a man who, without respect for the clerical vehicle, shouted with all the strength of his lungs: 'Half the road!' The dean turned aside, saying with a sigh: 'Has Björnson come to the Gausdal at last?'

"It was indeed so, and he showed his colors at the start. The same dean and Björnson became the best of friends afterwards, and found much sport in interchanging genial jests whenever they met."

Frits Thaulow, the painter, thus wrote to Björnson reminding him of a festive gathering of students:

"The manager came in and announced with a loud voice that it was past twelve. Then you sprang up.

"'Bring champagne! Now I will speak of what comes after twelve o'clock! of all that lies beyond the respectable hour for retiring! For the hour when fancy awakens and fills us with longings for the world of wonderland; then the painter sees only the dim outline in the moonlight, then the musician hears the silence, then the poet after his thoughtful day feels sprouting the first shoots of the next. After twelve freedom begins. The day's tumult is stilled, and the voice within becomes audible.'

"Thus you spoke, and 'after twelve' became a watchword with us.

"Many a spark has been kindled in your soul by the quiet evening time. But later in life, when you become a chieftain in the battle, broad daylight also made its demands upon you. Like the sun you shone upon us and made the best that was in us to grow, but I shall always keep a deep artistic affection for what comes 'after twelve.'"

Henrik Cavling tells the following story of the poet in Paris:

"It was one of Björnson's peculiarities to go out as a rule without any money in his pocket. He neither owned a purse nor knew the French coins. His personal expenditures were restricted to the books he bought, and now and then a theatre ticket. One day he came excitedly into the sitting-room, and asked:

"'Who took my five franc piece?' It was a five franc piece that he had got somewhere or other and had stuck in his pocket to buy a theatre ticket with. It turned out that the maid had found it and given it to Fru Björnson. For it seemed quite unthinkable to her that the master should have any money to take out with him.

"This complete indifference of Björnson to small matters sometimes proved annoying. In this connection I may tell of a little trip he once took with Jonas Lie.

"The two poets, who did not live far apart, had long counted with pleasure upon a trip to

Père Lachaise, where they wished to visit Alfred de Musset's grave. At last the day came, and with big soft hats on their heads, and engaged earnestly in conversation, they drove away through Paris.

"When they came to Père Lachaise, and wanted to enter the cemetery, the driver stopped them and asked for his pay. Then it appeared that neither had any money, which they smilingly explained, and asked him in bad French to wait and drive them home again. But the two gentlemen with the big soft hats had not inspired the driver with any marked degree of confidence. He made a scene, and attracted a great crowd of the boys, loafers, and well-dressed Frenchmen who always collect on critical occasions. The end of the affair was that the poets had to get into their cab again and drive all the long way back without having had a glimpse of the grave. When they reached Lie's lodgings, Lie went in to get some money, while Björnson sat in the cab as a hostage. Nevertheless, both poets maintained that they had had a pleasant expedition. A Norwegian question, which had accidentally come up between them, had made them forget all about Alfred de Musset."

Finally, a story may be given that is told by Björnson himself.

"I had a pair of old boots that I wanted to give to a beggar. But just as I was going to

give them to him, I began to wonder whether Karoline had not some use for them, since she usually gave such things to beggars. So I took the boots in my hand, and went downstairs to ask her, but on the way I got a little worked up because I did not quite dare to give them to the beggar myself. And the further I went down the steps, the more wrathful I got, until I stood over her. And then I was so angry that I had to bluster at her as if she had done me a grievous wrong. But she could not understand a word of what I said, and looked at me with such amazement, that I could not keep from bursting into laughter."

From his early years, Björnson kept in touch with the modern intellectual movement by mingling with the people of other lands than his own. Besides his visits to Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, he made many lengthy sojourns in the chief continental centres of civilization, in Munich, Rome, and Paris. The longest of his foreign journeys was that which brought him to the United States in the winter of 1880-81, for the purpose of addressing his fellow countrymen in the Northwest. His

home for the last thirty years and more has been his estate of Aulestad in the Gausdal, a region of Southern Norway. Here he has been a model farmer, and here, surrounded by his family,—wife, children, and grandchildren,—his patriarchal presence has given dignity to the household, and united its members in a common bond of love. Hither have come streams of guests, friends old and new, to enjoy his generous hospitality. There has been provision for all, both bed and board, and the heartiest of welcomes from the host. And the stranger from abroad has been greeted, as like as not, by the sight of his own country's flag streaming from a staff before the house, and foreshadowing the personal greeting that awaited him upon the threshold.

Björnson died in Paris (where he had been spending the winter, as was his custom for many years past), April 26, 1910.

He had been ill for several months, and only an extraordinarily robust constitution enabled him to make a partial recovery from the crisis of the preceding February, when his death had been hourly expected. The news of his death occasioned demonstrations of grief not only in his own country, but also throughout the civilized world. Every honor that a nation can bestow upon its illustrious dead was decreed him by King and Storthing; a warship was despatched to bear his remains to Christiania, and the pomp and circumstance of a state funeral acclaimed the sense of the nation's loss.

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